

[Miniature Books]

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK Forms to be Filled out for Each Interview

FORM A Circumstances of Interview

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Sidney Ascher

ADDRESS Brooklyn, New York

DATE January 9, 1939

SUBJECT MINIATURE BOOKS

1. Date and time of interview

January 6, 1939 at 11:30 A.M.

2. Place of interview

National Broadcasting Company's studios.

3. Name and address of informant Robert L. Henderson Boston, Mass.

4. Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant.

5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you

6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc.

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The room is about 20 x 20. The walls are sound-proof. At one end the wall is a plate of glass through which the engineer may signal to the persons at the microphone. There is a piano in the room and two microphones. There are about twenty folding chairs. The informant and interviewer were the only ones in the room at the time of the interview.

FORM B Personal History of Informant

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Sidney Ascher

ADDRESS Brooklyn, N. Y.

DATE January 9, 1939

SUBJECT MINIATURE BOOKS

1. Ancestry

English-American

2. Place and date of birth

Boston, Mass. about 1912

3. Family

Father, Mother, Sister

4. Places lived in, with dates

Boston, Mass.

Library of Congress

5. Education, with dates

University graduate (Harvard)

6. Occupations and accomplishments, with dates

Is in the real estate business with father

7. Special skills and interests

Interested in collecting miniature books.

8. Community and religious activities

Is active in community organizations.

9. Description of informant

About 5'8", twenty-six years old, brown eyes and hair Clean cut well dressed. Possesses a great deal of charm.

10. Other Points gained in interview

FORM C Text of Interview (Unedited)

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Sidney Ascher

ADDRESS Brooklyn, N. Y.

DATE January 9, 1939

SUBJECT MINIATURE BOOKS

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Together, my Dad and myself, we've managed to accumulate what has been publicly called the largest smallest library in the world—the largest collection of the smallest books in the world. We have approximately 10,000 volumes, and every book in our collection is under three inches in size. As a matter of fact, I can put fifty of the smallest ones in an ordinary sewing thimble. To give you an idea of the size of my entire collection—the average public library contains less than 10,000 volumes and yet it takes up an entire building to house them. My entire collection takes up the wall space in a fair size room, and are just as real as any books you can find in a book store. I can duplicate in miniature any subjects covered by regular sized volumes since the beginning of the written word. My oldest book dates from 3900 BC. It's a stone tablet from the ancient Kingdom of Babylon. I have some old parchment manuscripts too. One was started in 1542, and required the life time of six different monks to complete it. The writing shows the nervous palsy of old age as the last reverend brother prepared to lay down his pen. I have a little book in my collection—only one inch high and yet that tiny publication helped to win the World War.

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How? Well, I'll start at the beginning—The British Government was having trouble with its Mohammedan Allies who threatened to go over to the enemy. The British Government issued the Koran or Mohammedan Bible in miniature to each Mohammedan soldier. And that little gesture kept the Mohammedans loyal to the British.

The most outstanding miniature volume in my collection is this ring I'm wearing. It contains the complete Rubaiyat of Omar Kayan, with a biography of Omar and an introduction by Fitzgerald. The book is completely illustrated and measures six sixteenth by seven sixteenths of an inch. It is the only privately owned copy in the world. The ring which contains this book is the size of an ordinary finger ring.

I have a two inch copy of the Bible that has an amazing history. It is written in shorthand by Jeremiah Rich about 1850. You see, Jeremiah Rich was a teacher, and one of his pupils was a boy named Samuel Pepys. When Samuel Pepys wrote his diary no one could

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decipher it because it was written in an unknown code. In 1815 (that's 165 years later) someone came across this very Bible written in shorthand, and saw a list of names in the back of the volume — a list of Jeremiah Rich's pupils. In that list was the name of Samuel Pepys. The finder realized at once that the shorthand of Jeremiah Rich's testament — and the code of Samuel Pepy's diary were the same. This little book cleared up one of the most important historical documents of the Seventeenth Century.